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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000127

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [KJUS](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#) [TERFIN](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEN GENERAL AND ISLAH PARTY REACTION TO ARRESTS
IN GERMANY; GERMANY VIEWS

REF: A. SECSTATE 7011

[B](#). BERLIN 131

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The arrest of al-Moayed in Frankfurt has surprised many in Yemen, and public reaction is extremely negative. He is a well-known humanitarian to Yemenis, and many have expressed shock about a possible connection to al-Qaeda. The Islah party is particularly concerned, and similarly rejects the possibility that al-Moayed has an al-Qaeda connection. Negative public reaction to the arrests, possibly including demonstrations, is likely. The Yemeni government continues to low key the issue and press the FRG for repatriation. Embassy is assessing security implications. End Summary.

Negative Popular Reaction

[1](#)2. (S) Moayed is a Islah party Shura Council member and formerly a probable candidate for the parliamentary elections in April. Media reports (confirmed by PolFSN) noted that a petition with 1000 signatures calling for his release was circulated in Moayed's neighborhood in Sanaa, where he is regarded as a humanitarian who is against terrorism. The media has reported that the Islah party plans to provide lawyers to those arrested. Prominent Yemeni interlocutors confirmed to the DCM that Moayed is a noted humanitarian, active in aiding the poor in general -- particularly via the provision of free food to thousands of low-income Sanaa residents. Embassy contacts also recall that he was "the leading recruiter in Sanaa" for volunteers to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. One (pro-U.S.) Yemeni NGO official described Moayed as "a big mouth" who sometimes rants about U.S. policy. Nevertheless, a range of contacts agree that his sermons also oppose anti-Western terrorism, and uniformly view him as an extremely unlikely candidate for al-Qaeda terrorist affiliation.

Islah Approach

[1](#)3. (S) Urgent requests for a meeting with PolOff were made by members of the Islah, and PolOff met with Islah Political Director Mohamed Qahtan on January 12. Qahtan, a well-known moderate, said that he is convinced that al Moayed could have nothing to do with al-Qaeda, and noted that in his last mosque speech he condemned terrorism strongly with specific references to the incidents in Jibla and against Jarallah Omar. He also described al Moayed's humanitarian work on behalf of the poor, and expressed concern about his health while in custody. Qahtan said that while he would not be shocked by some people being definitively linked with al-Qaeda, the alleged links between Moayed and al-Qaeda were unbelievable as he was not an extremist personality. Qahtan asked for evidence of such links, and said that if such evidence were provided his party would support the arrest because Islah is totally against al-Qaeda. (Comment: Not true, especially Islah's Zindani wing. End Comment) Qahtan said that Islah feels strongly enough to offer to take responsibility for al Moayed and provide guarantees unless clear evidence emerged to prove links to al-Qaeda.

[1](#)4. (S) PolOff said that the two arrested were being held in Germany pending a court hearing, and that details about the criminal case would become public as the legal process continued. PolOff noted that there was evidence linking al Moayed to al-Qaeda financing. Qahtan asked about whether al Moayed's fundraising for Hamas via al-Aqsa would also be part of the court case, noting that while "everyone was against al-Qaeda, support for Palestinians is another matter." PolOff emphasized a focus on links to al-Qaeda and allowing due process to take its course. PolOff said that these arrests should not become a political issue between Islah and the U.S., and restraint in politicizing the arrests within Yemen would be prudent to avoid inflaming the situation. Qahtan agreed to advise restraint and said he hoped that the dialogue on this issue will continue.

German Assessment

15. (S) German Ambassador to Yemen Werner Zimprich told Ambassador Hull January 14 that he has received several "grass roots" appeals from Yemeni beneficiaries of al-Moayed's charity to return him to Yemen. ROYG Interior Minister Alimi, who enjoys significant credibility, also argued strongly, in support of Yemen's case, with Ambassador Zimprich that al-Moayed has no links to terrorism. The German Ambassador is re-assessing security for German citizens, including many development assistance workers. As yet, he has not decided on a formal drawdown, but some Embassy employees have been encouraged to extend leaves outside Yemen.

Comment

16. (S) Comment: Several contacts have told Post they expect an active negative public reaction, including possible demonstrations. The course of the German extradition process and subsequent U.S. prosecution will be followed closely by many Yemenis and will influence the shape of popular reaction in Yemen. Embassy will assess security ramifications for Amcits at an EAC January 14. As we proceed with extradition, U.S. public diplomacy should stress fair legal processes, al-Qaeda links and appropriate humanitarian treatment, e.g. medical care for any health problems. End Comment.
HULL